

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 3541

EXDIS

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TAGS: PINT, PFOR, UR

SUBJECT: DISSIDENT JEWS PLAN INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

1. SUMMARY. JEWISH DISSIDENT SOURCES HAVE TOLD US OF PLANS TO HOLD AN "INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM" ON JEWISH CULTURE IN THE USSR DECEMBER 19-21 IN MOSCOW. THE ORGANIZERS HOPE TO RECEIVE SEMINAR PAPERS FROM ABROAD AND HAVE INVITED FOREIGN PARTICIPANTS. THEY HAVE ALSO INVITED REPRESENTATIVES FROM SOVIET COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS SO THEIR PLANS ARE KNOWN TO THE AUTHORITIES. THEY NEVERTHELESS HOPE TO BE ABLE TO CARRY OUT THE SYMPOSIUM. END SUMMARY.

2. MOSCOW JEWISH DISSIDENT SOURCES HAVE GIVEN US A PLANNED AGENDA FOR THE SYMPOSIUM. THE TWO MAIN SUBJECTS ARE THE PRESENT STATE OF JEWISH CULTURE IN USSR AND ITS FUTURE PROSPECTS. THE FIRST SECTION HAS SEVEN SUBTHEMES INCLUDING JEWISH LINGUISTIC, ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS CHARACTERISTICS, THE ROLE OF RELIGION, THE PROBLEMS OF JEWISH TRADITIONS, AND JEWISH "NATIONALITY" AND SOCIAL LIFE BOTH IN OTHER SOCIALIST COUNTRIES AND IN THE WEST. IN PREPARATION FOR THE SYMPOSIUM, THE ORGANIZERS HAVE DISTRIBUTED A QUESTIONNAIRE TO MORE THAN 1,000 SOVIET JEWS FROM ALL OVER THE USSR. THERE ARE QUESTIONS ON THE CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC STATUS OF THOSE ASKED. THE RESULTS ARE TO BE USED AS THE BASIS
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FOR SEVERAL DISCUSSION GROUPS. THE SECOND MAIN AREA

INCLUDES AS SUBTHEMES LIKELY DEVELOPMENTS IN SOVIET JEWISH CULTURE, WAYS OF TRANSFERRING AND PRESERVING THE JEWISH HERITAGE, THE ROLE OF THE BIBLE AND TALMUD, SOVIET JEWS AND WORLD JEWRY, THE INFLUENCE OF ISRAELI AND WESTERN JEWISH COMMUNITY ON SOVIET JEWRY AND INTERNAL RIGHTS AND CULTURE. (AGENDA POUCHED TO EUR/SOV).

3. OUR SOURCES CLAIM THAT THEY HAVE SENT OUT ABOUT 70 INVITATIONS TO PROMINENT WESTERN JEWISH ACADEMIC SPECIALISTS INVITING THEM TO PARTICIPATE PERSONALLY IN THE SYMPOSIUM OR TO SEND PAPERS ON ONE OR MORE OF THE PROPOSED THEMES. THE DUE DATE FOR PAPERS IS NOVEMBER 15 AND OUR SOURCES SAY THAT THEY HAVE THUS FAR RECEIVED NO RESPONSES EITHER THROUGH THE SOVIET POST OR UNOFFICIALLY (THROUGH VISITING WESTERN TOURISTS). THEY HOPE, NEVERTHELESS, TO RECEIVE AT LEAST SOME PAPERS. THEY FEEL THAT EVEN A TOKEN FOREIGN PARTICIPATION IN THE DISCUSSIONS WILL IMPROVE THEIR QUALITY AND WILL ALSO UNDERLINE FOR SOVIET AUTHORITIES THE CONTINUED INTEREST OF WESTERN JEWS IN SOVIET JEWRY.

4. AS A CONTINGENCY PLAN, IN CASE NO WESTERN PARTICIPATION IS POSSIBLE, WE ARE TOLD THAT WESTERN JEWS ARE ORGANIZING A PARALLEL SEMINAR, TO BE HELD IN WESTERN EUROPE AT THE SAME TIME AS THE SOVIET EFFORT AND EXPLICITLY LINKED TO IT.

5. OUR SOURCES CLAIM THAT THEY ARE MORE INTERESTED IN PRODUCING HIGH-QUALITY DISCUSSION THAN IN MAKING A POLITICAL POINT, THOUGH THE LATTER IS IMPORTANT, TOO. THEY HAVE, THEREFORE, ASKED THE COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SYMPOSIUM. THEY HAVE NO ILLUSIONS THAT THERE WILL BE ANY OFFICIAL PARTICIPATION BUT EXPRESS SOME VAGUE HOPE THAT THE OFFICIAL INVITATION MAY FORESTALL A TOTAL BAN ON THE SEMINAR ITSELF. THEY APPARENTLY FEEL THAT SINCE THE AUTHORITIES WOULD HAVE FOUND OUT IN ANY CASE ABOUT THE SYMPOSIUM THE ORGANIZERS WERE BETTER ADVISED TO INFORM THEM OF IT.

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6. THE SYMPOSIUM WAS ORGANIZED BY A GROUP OF 13 OF MOSCOW'S MOST PROMINENT "REFUSENIK" JEWS. MOST OF THESE BELONG TO THE "SUNDAY SEMINAR" GROUP AND IT IS CLEAR THAT THE INSPIRATION FOR THEM TO HOLD THIS SYMPOSIUM STEMS FROM THE REMARKABLE SUCCESS, OVER A PERIOD OF SEVERAL YEARS, OF THE SUNDAY SEMINAR ITSELF. OUR SOURCES EXPECT TO BEGIN ORGANIZING THE DETAILS OF THEIR SYMPOSIUM NOW THAT THE SUMMER VACATION SEASON IS END-

ING.

7. BEGIN COMMENT. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE AT THIS POINT
CONFIDENTLY TO ASSESS THE CHANCE FOR THE SYMPOSIUM TO
TAKE PLACE. THE AUTHORITIES CERTAINLY HAVE HAD ENOUGH
WARNING TO MOVE DECISIVELY AGAINST IT SHOULD THEY SO
CHOOSE. THERE ARE, HOWEVER, A NUMBER OF FACTORS WHICH MILI-
TATE IN FAVOR OF SOME FORM OF SYMPOSIUM ACTUALLY BEING
HELD:

--THE TRACK RECORD OF THE "SUNDAY SEMINAR" IN RESISTING
THE PRESSURE OF SOVIET POLICE AUTHORITIES HAS BEEN SUR-
PRISINGLY GOOD. ROUGHLY 20 PERCENT OF ITS SESSIONS ARE
ADDRESSED BY FOREIGN VISITORS, AND THE ORIGINATORS HAVE
A GREAT DEAL OF EXPERIENCE IN ARRANGING FOR FOREIGN PAR-
TICIPATION. WE DOUBT, HOWEVER, IF MANY OF THE INVITED
PARTICIPANTS WILL ACTUALLY BE ABLE TO COME TO THE SOVIET
UNION AND PARTICIPATE, ALTHOUGH MANY PAPERS WILL PROBABLY
ARRIVE AND BE READ DURING THE SYMPOSIUM'S SESSIONS.

-- THE ORGANIZERS MAY WELL DECIDE TO SHORTEN THE AGENDA AND
PRESENT THE MAIN SUBJECTS IN THE CONTEXT OF SLIGHTLY
EXTENDED SESSIONS OF THE NORMAL SUNDAY SEMINAR. THIS
WILL REDUCE THE IMPACT THAT WOULD BE GENERATED BY THE
SYMPOSIUM, BUT IT WOULD ALSO POSE MANY FEWER PROBLEMS
FOR THE AUTHORITIES.

-- FINALLY, THE BELGRADE CSCE REVIEW CONFERENCE BY THEN
WILL BE ONLY SOME SIX MONTHS AWAY, AND THIS FACT MAY
ENCOURAGE THE SOVIET AUTHORITIES TO PERMIT SOME FORM
OF SYMPOSIUM.

8. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THIS IS A SERIOUS AND CLEVERLY
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THOUGHT OUT ATTEMPT ON THE PART OF THE MOSCOW DISSIDENT
COMMUNITY TO GAIN INTERNATIONAL PUBLICITY, AT THE SAME
TIME THAT THEY SEEK TO STUDY THE PROBLEMS AFFECTING THEM.
IT PRESENTS A NUMBER OF PROBLEMS FOR THE AUTHORITIES, AND
WHILE THE ODDS FAVOR SOME SORT OF SYMPOSIUM BEING HELD,
THE AUTHORITIES COULD BECOME SUFFICIENTLY IRRITATED TO
DECIDE TO FIND SOME PRETEXT TO ARREST THE ORGANIZERS
OR (MORE LIKELY) TO CONFINED THEM UNDER HOUSE ARREST ON
THE DATES OF THE SYMPOSIUM.
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